

# 29. MARIAN DEVOTION

## Summary:

1. The presence and importance of the Blessed Virgin in the life and the work of St. John Baptist De La Salle. 1.1. Pilgrimage to Our Lady of Liesse. 1.2. Before the altar, of Our Lady of Virtues. 1.3. The "Heroic Vow" — the feast of the Presentation of Mary in the Temple. 1.4. Chartres: in the Chapel of the Holy Virgin. 1.5. Pious procession through the gardens of the Grand Maison. 1.6. Marseilles: the Shrine of Notre Dame de la Garde. 1.7. Delicate advice to the Dean of Calais. — 2. Devotional practices in honour of Mary. 2.1. Reasons for these practices. 2.2. Each day filled with love of Mary. 2.3. For particular circumstances. — 3. De La Salle's Marian legacy to the Brothers. 3.1. An exceptional Marian devotion. 3.2. Mary in the liturgy of the Church. 3.3. The source of Mary's privileges. 3.4. Mary-Mother of all people. 3.5. Outstanding virtues in Mary. 3.6. Mary's action in the Church and in people. 3.7. De La Salle - servant of Mary. — 4. De La Salle's vision of the role of Mary in the work of education. — 5. Theology and ecclesiology that emerges from the Lasallian teaching with regard to Mary. 5.1. A teaching tested in the heat of prayer and meditation. 5.2. Characteristics of Marian devotion indicated by De La Salle. 5.3. With regard to the education of pupils. 5.4. De La Salle's teaching on Mary sure, balanced and profound. — 6. Conclusion - De La Salle as a qualified Marian representative.

## 1. THE PRESENCE AND IMPORTANCE OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN IN THE LIFE AND THE WORK OF ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE

To be a Christian is to be Marian — it is to recognize that Mary leads one to Jesus. "De La Salle, as a good Christian, was outstanding in devotion to the Mother of God" (Blain 2,488). "There were few people so convinced as De La Salle of the obligation of all the faithful to profess an extremely tender devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin" (Blain 2,488). His Marian devotion was in harmony, and on a par, with that of his predecessors or contemporaries such as Bérulle, Olier, Vincent de Paul, Grignon de Montfort, etc.

De La Salle was born in the shadow of the cathedral dedicated to Our Lady. At the age of 16, he became a canon in this famous cathedral and continued his theological studies in the Sorbonne and in the seminary of St. Sulpice where there was

a cultivated Marian atmosphere and a tradition of a daily visit to some place dedicated to the Mother of God.<sup>1</sup> In 1678, on the feast of the Resurrection, in the presence of his closest family in addition to his most intimate friends, he celebrated his first Mass in the Lady Chapel of "Our Lady of the Cathedral".<sup>2</sup>

## THE MOST SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

### 1.1. The Pilgrimage to our Lady of Liesse

In May 1686, in Rheims, De La Salle gathered the principal Brothers to discuss important aspects with them in regard to the fledgling Society. On June 9th, the feast of the Blessed Trinity, the Saint and his Brothers made profession of the vow of obedience for three years. The following day, they decided to make a pilgrimage to the celebrated sanctuary of the Our Lady of Liesse.<sup>3</sup> They went

joyfully and, before the altar of Our Lady, they consecrated their life and work to Our Lady. From that time on they remained under her maternal care and protection because “she has such great power before God” (Blain 2,490). From that time onwards, too, De La Salle named Mary as “Superior of the Institute” (Blain 2,484) and its principal “protectress and support” (MF 129,3). The smile of Mary on this devoted group was to be a blessing of hope — they could now return contentedly to their respective communities.

### **1.2. Before the altar of Our Lady of Virtues**

At some seven kilometres from the district of St. Sulpice, in the little village of Aubervilliers, was the church dedicated to Our Lady of Virtues. The biographers of De La Salle directly relate this pilgrimage to the first confrontations of the Founder with the schoolmasters of the capital. These had succeeded in bringing a court case against De La Salle and his schools and he reluctantly decided to appeal. However, before doing so, he undertook a pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady accompanied by the Brothers of the Parisian communities. They went to seek heavenly support, through her mediation, for the strength necessary to continue the struggle of justice in favour of the children and the youth living in area of St. Sulpice. Moreover, at a time of crisis, De La Salle also brought the needs of the new Society before Mary since between 1688 and 1692 no new candidate had entered the Institute. De La Salle wanted to see the Society strengthened in Paris from where his schools could spread to the rest of the regions of France. After fulfilling their pious desires, the Saint and the Brothers returned to their communities with a sense of victory because they had put their case in good hands. De La Salle presented a statement to the court in which, with the aid of weighty arguments, he justified his presence and that of the Brothers in the educational service of the poor of the parish. The statement produced the desired effect and the case was resolved in favour of the Lasallian schools.<sup>4</sup> All this occurred in the course of the year 1690.

### **1.3. The “heroic vow”: The feast of the presentation of Mary in the Temple**

As indicated above, De La Salle and his work went through very delicate times. Some Brothers left the Institute while one of the most important, Brother Henri l’Heureux, in whom the Saint had placed his confidence, died suddenly. The cumulative effect was that the Society found itself almost as it was at the beginning. Yet, De La Salle trusted in God to whom he had committed himself. Consequently, in the silence and solitariness of the community, he and Brothers Nicolas Vuyart and Gabriel Drolin, on their knees before the presence of God, pronounced the “heroic vow” of obedience, “committing themselves to remain in the Society and to continue to support the schools for the poor even if they had to live on bread” (FV). According to the biographers the day on which this occurred was the 21st of November, the day on which the Church commemorates the presentation of the Most Blessed Virgin in the Temple.<sup>5</sup>

### **1.4. Chartres: in “The chapel of the Holy Virgin”**

After a wait of some years, the Bishop of Chartres, Paul Gaudet des Marais, had his request granted to have a Lasallian school in his episcopal city. The seven Brothers whom the Saint had sent to his friend were lodged in the Rue Muret, very near to the Cathedral. They had been there about ten years when the Bishop wanted to move them to another house which was less suitable and in which their health would have been endangered. The Saint, in a letter to Brother Hubert, Director of the Community, dated 20th July, 1709, asked that both the Brothers and the pupils visit “the chapel of the Holy Virgin” to beg Mary that the desires of the prelate would not be fulfilled (L 37,2).<sup>6</sup> The Bishop died on the 26th of September leaving the Community without a protector. It was reasonable that the Saint should think of withdrawing the Brothers but he did not do it; “he listened neither to natural feelings nor to discontented individuals... The great devotion to the Mother of God which characterized the town of

Chartres, making it illustrious in the Kingdom, is one of the reasons why the Brothers remained” (Blain 1,377).<sup>7</sup>

### **1.5. The devout procession through the gardens of the Grand Maison (Blain 2,3)**

From 1698 until 1703, De La Salle lived with the Brothers in the Parisian community of the Grand Maison, so called because of the ample dimensions of the property which contained patios and large gardens. The Founder wanted to have a suitable house for the novices and, consequently, at nightfall each evening, frequent processions were organised through the gardens for all the members of the community with the aim of obtaining the desired grace through the intercession of Our Lady. It is worth noting, too, that at the moment when all hope appeared to have gone — given that they were requested to leave the Grand Maison because they were unable to acquire it when it was up for sale — his hopes were realized in Rouen in 1705.

### **1.6. Marseilles: the shrine of Notre Dame de la Garde**

De La Salle was in Marseilles in August 1712 and, apparently, things were going better in that the Founder had been able to open a Novitiate thus creating an opening for the Institute in the South of France. As on other occasions, De La Salle repeated a gesture which was particular to him. A short distance from the city was the shrine of Notre Dame de la Garde and, with those in formation, he visited it so that Mary could listen to their deepest prayers and petitions. She was to be his consolation, too, in those moments when his dearest dreams appeared to be in ruins.<sup>8</sup>

### **1.7. Delicate advice to the Dean of Calais**

According to his biographers, De La Salle spent the 15th August visiting the Brothers and his close friends in Calais where the Dean took advantage of his visit to invite him to celebrate solemn Mass in the Cathedral. The Dean delivered the homily but made no reference whatsoever to the theme of the day - i.e. the Assumption of

Mary into Heaven. De La Salle brought the omission to the attention of his friend who could not help but feel embarrassed and promised the Founder that he would make good the damage. His parishioners, who knew him well, were amazed to hear their priest speak about Mary with so much piety (Blain 2,225).

## **2. DEVOTIONAL PRACTICES IN HONOUR OF MARY**

### **2.1. Reasons for these practices**

According to De La Salle, “nothing better indicates the love of one person for another than the inability to think of anything but the other” (MD 70,3). The life of De La Salle was consistent with what he wrote in that he never suggested anything to his Brothers before putting it into practice himself. Thus he wrote: “it will avail us but little to be persuaded of the obligation which we have to profess special devotion to the Blessed Virgin unless we are aware of what this devotion consists, unless it is, in fact, part of us and unless it is evident in us when the occasion warrants” (MF 151,3). He justified this preference for Mary to his Brothers in the following way, “she is above all creatures. We show our devotion to the saints on certain days and at certain times of the year but that which we must show to Mary should be continuous” (MF 151,3). De La Salle questions us, too, “about the dispositions with which, we fulfill our devotions”, about the fidelity in which we accomplish them since “this is necessary if we hope to receive abundant graces from God through Mary” (MF 151,3).

### **2.2. Each day filled with love of Mary**

Mary occupied a special place in the thoughts of the Founder and he wanted the Brothers to have a similar experience because “after God, they place all their confidence in Mary” and because “they consider Mary as the principal protectress of the Congregation” (MF 151,3). Consequently, it is natural that the Founder should say that “every day we place ourselves under her protection, in the morning after mental prayer, conse-

crating ourselves to Mary through the beautiful prayer *O Domina mea* (Blain 2,491). After each important exercise “we put ourselves under (her) protection by reciting the prayer *Sub tuum* (Blain 2,491) while at the end of the day, during night prayer, the Saint and the Brothers had the custom of reciting the *Maria Mater Gratiae*, the prayer which preceded nightly repose and which, as well, was dear to De La Salle — it was, in fact, the prayer which he prayed at the end of his life on 7th April, 1719 (Blain 2,491).

The recitation of the Rosary was a daily Marian devotional practice of De La Salle and the Brothers which was incorporated into the Rule. His devotion was highlighted by Blain in the following way; “he never let a single day pass without reciting it. He recited it in walking through the streets and was zealous in proclaiming its excellence. In this way he showed his fidelity and love of Mary” (Blain 2,490).

An early document, entitled “The practice of a daily Rule” — which apparently dates back to 1693 — indicates some practices, besides those mentioned above, which were in use in the Congregation, such as the recitation of the *Angelus* at the end of mental prayer each day. The recitation of the *Angelus* and the *Sub tuum* also terminated evening prayer while it was usual to finish night prayer with the *Litanias Lauretanis*.<sup>9</sup>

### 2.3. For particular circumstances

His concerns with the direction of the Institute did not always leave De La Salle with the time necessary to satisfy his devotions and desire for periods of prayer in the way he would have liked. However, he was particularly interested in accompanying the Novices in prayer. “Whenever he could, he recited the Office with them with his head bare and on his knees” (Blain 2,236). Through the Office, he wrote, “one praises God in the Blessed Virgin and the Blessed Virgin in God through psalms, hymns, antiphons and responses and through the prayers which terminate each hour of the Office. One prays to God for oneself and for the Church, relying on

the protection and intercession of Mary for the graces which we need”.<sup>10</sup>

“He exhorted the Brothers to celebrate Marian feasts with special fervour”. “In the evening, before supper, he gave the Brothers a half-hour’s fervent exhortation on the feast of the particular day” (Blain 2,491). On special feast-days which were not obligatory - e.g. the feast of the Immaculate Conception, the Annunciation, the Holy Name of Mary, the Assumption, the Visitation and the Presentation in the Temple — De La Salle prescribed that the school holiday be taken on this day instead of on the Thursday.<sup>11</sup>

De La Salle considered daily recreation after meals as an important time in the life of the Brothers and he wanted this time, too, to be a time of mutual edification. Consequently, the first topic of conversation was the reading from the Lives of the Saints but another topic concerned Marian devotion in that he invited the Brothers to consider “how sensitive (they) must be with regard to what refers to Mary — the manner and devotion with which they must recite the Office and the Rosary in the Society and how they must make use of it themselves so as to cultivate devotion for it and inspire devotion for it in children” (R. 33,VI).

We have already mentioned the pilgrimages of De La Salle and the Brothers to various Marian shrines and in the third part of his book, “**The Duties of a Christian**”, dedicated to “public and exterior worship”, he takes great pains to indicate the way in which the processions and pilgrimages to the Marian shrines should be undertaken (DC III, 21,22). In treating of the honour due to Mary nothing seems too much for De La Salle.

According to Blain, “De La Salle entrusted himself to Mary on every occasion. In his troubles and persecutions he threw himself into her arms as into those of his mother. Everything important that he undertook was entrusted to her” (Blain 2,491) while, as we know well, his final recommendation or spiritual testament, “was that the Brothers would profess a special devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin” (Blain 2,173).

## **1. DE LA SALLE'S MARIAN LEGACY TO THE BROTHERS**

### **3.1. An exceptional Marian devotion**

“De La Salle’s Marian devotion was deeply embedded in his heart and one of his greatest joys was to defend and propagate it” (Blain 2,488). When De La Salle spoke or wrote about Mary he revealed the depths of his personality with naturalness. His ideal was clearly sketched and his admiration and love of Mary was expressed with enthusiasm. He never wrote a complete treatise on Mary but from what he wrote we can conclude that his devotion to Mary was exceptional. The theme of Mary is treated in a special way in the nine meditations which he wrote on the subject — in relation to the feasts of the Nativity, the Holy Name of Mary, the Presentation in the Temple, the Purification, the Annunciation and the Visitation. As the founder of a religious institute dedicated to the education of Christian children and youth, he also included Marian teaching in his ascetical and pedagogical works, especially in the Method of Mental Prayer and in the Meditations for Feasts, proposing Mary as the model of the Christian educator.

What De La Salle said and wrote about Mary is more than sufficient to enable one to gauge the importance which he gave to the presence of Mary in the spirituality of the Christian educator and in the Christian life in general. He speaks to us of Mary as Mother of God and Mother of all people, about the virtues which adorn her person and about the Marian privileges par excellence - e.g. mediation, fount of graces.

### **3.2. Mary in the liturgy of the Church**

Throughout the liturgical cycle of the year De La Salle presents Mary inseparably united to Jesus. Allusions to Our Lady are frequent as, for example, in the feasts of the Holy Family, the miracle at Cana and in the mystery of Christmas. It is similarly present in the feasts of some outstanding saints such as St. Joachim and St. Anne, St. John the Apostle and St. Dominic.

### **3.3. Source of Mary’s privileges**

#### **A - Mary, Mother of God**

De La Salle speaks of Mary as the Mother of God and it was as a consequence of this that she became worthy of the other privileges which God wished to confer on her, “in union with the whole Church, let us proclaim the honour that is conferred on the Most Blessed Virgin on becoming the Mother of God which is the greatest favour that could possibly be bestowed on a created being” (MF 112,1). Elsewhere he wrote; “before all eternity God predestined Mary to be the Mother of his Son” (MF 82,1).

#### **B - Mary, the perfect work of God**

De La Salle sees in Mary the perfect work of God who “preferred to choose a virgin who was worthy to be his temple and dwelling place. Accordingly, he ordained that she be adorned by the Holy Spirit with all the natural and supernatural qualities appropriate for the Mother of God” (MF 163,1).

#### **C - Mary, Tabernacle of God**

Mary is the Temple which God built for himself. Completely awed by such a miracle, De La Salle writes; “Honour Mary as the Tabernacle and living Temple that God himself built and adorned with his own hands” (MF 191,3; 151,2). Mary is the exceptional creature “raised above all others by the abundance of gifts which she has received and in which she is incomparable” (MF 151,2).

#### **D - Mary, full of grace**

She is full of grace and of the Holy Spirit; “the fact that the Holy Spirit descended on her made her radiant with divine beauty” (MF 151,2). “Mary was immaculate in her conception” (MF 82,1) and glorified by her Son. Through her fidelity to grace Mary “has been raised above all the blessed spirits who venerate her as their Queen” (MF 156,3).

### 3.4. Mary, Mother of all people

It also pleased De La Salle to present Mary to us as “Mother of all people”. Not simply as a privileged woman, exalted in glory by God, but rather as a mother, as a woman, as a wife, as the person charged with responsibility for the family and for the house. She is a woman who freely co-operated with the grace and the desires of God for her and she is also the example both of how to love Jesus and of how a mother is sanctified through daily household chores.

Mary is the simple woman who did not seek to draw attention to herself. “If the Most Blessed Virgin could have been seen as the Mother of the Messiah in Bethlehem... But as she was looked upon simply as an ordinary mother and a working-man’s wife, there was no place for her anywhere” (MF 85,1). She is the wife of Joseph (MF 110,2), the woman who freely co-operated with God, “who consecrated herself totally to live the rest of her life for Him” (MF 163,3). She offered her son in the presentation in the temple at Jerusalem as well as in the circumcision (MF 104,2) and through the visit which she made to her cousin Elizabeth “God wished that, while Jesus was still in (her) womb, he would work his first miracle for the benefit of his precursor” (MF 141,2).

Mary loved her son in a special way and all those who love Jesus are also deeply loved by her. This sentiment is admirably expressed by De La Salle in the following quotation taken from the meditation dedicated to St. John the Evangelist: “if you love Jesus and are loved by Him it is impossible that you are not deeply loved by the Most Blessed Virgin. Since there is a very close relationship between Jesus and his Most Blessed Mother, all those who love Jesus and are especially loved by Him give honour, too, to Mary and are, as well, deeply loved by this Holy Mother of God” (MF 88,3).

### 3.5. Virtues which De La Salle highlights in Mary

“Mary is the bright and brilliant star which shines above this vast and spacious sea of the world; bright by the lustre of her merits and brilliant by the power of her example” (MF 164,1). “She is the woman totally consecrated and de-

icated to the Lord for life” (MF 156,3) who “recognized that she owed everything to God” (MF 79,2; 163,3). “She is the obedient and diligent woman” (MF 104,2), “humble and poor” (MF 86,2) and “completely free of sin” (MF 82,2; 164,2).

### 3.6. Mary’s Action in the Church and in people

It was a source of joy for De La Salle to indicate the presence of Mary in the Church through her intercessory activity, in her role close to Jesus as protectress, and as a living memory cherished by devout souls. As models of the latter he presents such eminent saints as St. Philip Neri and St. Francis of Assisi as well as the great St. Bernard and St. Dominic (MF 129,3; 151,2; 164). Mary is venerated by the whole Church and “it is an ancient practice, writes De La Salle, “to pray to the Most Blessed Virgin in preference to all other saints” (DC 1,465). The Church also reminds us of “what those devoted to Mary have done for her and the favours which they have obtained in consequence” (MF 151,1) since “everything that we do to honour Mary, or to have her honoured, will be abundantly rewarded by God through her” (MF 151,1).

Since Mary always hears our prayers and possesses great influence before God, she is in a position to help us in all that refers to our salvation. De La Salle loved to go before Mary with prayers full of tenderness and outstanding confidence (DC 1,465). Reflecting on Mary in the mystery of Christmas he invokes her thus; “through you, oh incomparable Virgin, this God of love and mercy came to save us” (EM C.L. 50, 194 N 194). He made fervent prayers of adoration to the Lord in contemplating him as a child in the arms of his Mother and payed grateful tribute to Mary as Mother of God (EM C.L. 50, 215, 216 N 215, 216).

With regard to the praise of Mary, everything, according to De La Salle, is inadequate since words do not reach their mark. For this reason he indicated to the Brothers that, in speaking of Mary, they should do so by means of her title “the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, a title which she so merits” (Blain 2,490). The references to Mary in the Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer

are both numerous and fervent, thus, for example, he writes that “the most Blessed Mother of God who, while being the most noble, holy, perfect and the most excellent of all creatures, was also the most humble” (EM C.L. 50, 340). With this, and many other examples in praise of Mary’s greatness used by De La Salle, one could easily compose a beautiful Marian litany with a distinctive Lasallian flavour.

In his Marian devotions, De La Salle also made use of the those prayers through which the Church throughout history has invoked Mary. Consequently, he urged the Brothers to recite the Salve, the Angelus and the Rosary as a sign of love for her (DC 1,465).

As a Doctor of Theology, De La Salle presents the traditional teaching of the Church when writing about Mary. While, as yet, some Marian privileges had not been declared dogmas of the Church, De La Salle treats them as devotions which were common to the faithful, to theologians or to saints, in order to defend them or as an expression of his desire that they be proclaimed with ecclesial authority — as, for example, with the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of Mary. With regard to other outstanding Marian qualities, De La Salle expressed himself with clarity if not at length. Thus, for example, speaking of her universal mediation with her Son, he wrote: “in bringing Jesus into the world Mary has contributed to the salvation of all people and God has made her the fount of all the graces which he wishes to grant to people” (DC 11, instruction XII; Blain 2,490). This same thought is accentuated when he says: “if Mary has received such an abundance of graces it was to share them with those who have recourse to her” (MF 163,3). Elsewhere, quoting directly from St. Bernard, he adds; “Mary is the channel through which those graces come to us which God wants to bestow” (MF 151,2) and he emphasizes the same thought with another quotation from St. Bernard; “the Holy Spirit confers all his gifts, graces and virtues on those whom he wishes, as it pleases him, and in the way he judges opportune, through the medium of the Most Blessed Virgin” (MF 151,2; 164,2. Cf. Vat II, LG 62).<sup>12</sup>

### 3.7. De La Salle - servant of Mary

“Throughout the course of his life, De La Salle felt honoured to consider himself a devoted servant of Mary and he took pains to ensure that others honoured her” (Blain 2,489). While he did not dwell at length on this aspect of Marian devotion,<sup>13</sup> he expressed himself, in the Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer, in the following affectionate prayer to his Mother; “You are my Queen and Lady... I submit myself to your gentle will in time and in eternity” (EM C.L. 50, 216). He relates Mary’s role in salvation to that of Jesus — it is through Mary that the will of God has been accomplished in Jesus, the only mediator, and it is through her, too, that we ask God that it be accomplished to-day (Cf. EM C.L. 50, N 194).

## 4. DE LA SALLE’S VISION OF THE ROLE OF MARY IN THE WORK OF EDUCATION

De La Salle presents Mary to the Brothers as a model of the consecrated life and of apostolic dedication. Following the example of Mary, the Brother consecrates himself entirely and without reserve to God (Cf. MF 191,1.2) to procure his glory in so far as it is possible (V.F.). In the mystery of the Presentation in the Temple Mary offered Jesus to God, his Father, and “the Brother must also daily renew his desire to do everything for Him” (MF 104,2). De La Salle also takes advantage of the gospel story of Mary’s visit to her cousin Elizabeth to remind the Brothers that they, too, are “visited every day by God in prayer, and frequently by Jesus in communion”. “The Lord communicates his holy inspirations with the sole aim that we be diligent in putting them into practice so that his holy will is accomplished exactly” (MF 141,1.3).

Mary’s life in Nazareth unfolded simply and without remarkable incidents. She made no attempt whatsoever to seek the attention of people. De La Salle frequently reminds the Brothers that their hidden and simple life should be entirely dedicated to the poor whom the the Brothers must

approach with “hearts of the poor”. In his meditation for Christmas Day this thought is expressed as follows; “you are poor Brothers, forgotten by the world and esteemed of no consequence” (MF 86,2). Both Mary and the Brother bring God’s plan to fruition in their lives by sanctifying all their daily actions. Both in the classroom and in community life, the Brother “must, like Mary, live a life of complete detachment” (MF 156,1). For the Brother, Mary is also the model of faith (L 131,1) and of complete submission to God’s will for him (Cf. MF 161,1). She is also a sure “way” and a “guide”; she is the “star” and the “beacon” which guides and enlightens through difficulties, bringing one to the safe haven (MF 164). She allowed herself to be directed in every moment by the Spirit of God and by his holy inspirations (AEP, 232,233).

De La Salle wishes that the Brother manifests in his life what Mary signifies for him. Thus, with sincere and well-founded conviction, he writes; “God, who has chosen you to make him known, wishes also, in a manner of speaking, that you engender devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin in the hearts of those whom you teach, inspiring in them, a tender devotion towards Her”. He continues by saying that “this effect must be the result of your fervent prayers, of your love of the Most Blessed Virgin, and of the zeal you show in your teaching to inculcate love of her in them” (MF 146,2; 150,3; 157,1).

Nobody has better accomplished the educational task than Mary in her relationship with Jesus. No mother could love her son as Mary loved Jesus and nobody could put the teaching of the “Good News” into practice as she did — she was the living Gospel before it came to be written. What an exalted project that De La Salle proposes to the Brothers to be lived out in their own lives and to be presented to those whom they are educating! Thus they are to “ensure that they (the pupils) frequently think about Jesus their good and only Lord; that they speak often of him, aspire only after him, live only for him” (MF 102,2). Thus, in the Lasallian school, the presence of Mary, leading to Jesus, is lively and efficacious, enlightening and exemplary.

In no fewer than 80 pages<sup>14</sup> De La Salle illustrates the importance of Mary in the life of the

Brother as one consecrated to God and as a Christian educator. He emphasises that “one of the best means that you can employ to make your work fruitful is to have a very particular devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin and inculcate it in the hearts of those who have been confided to you” (MF 150,3; 146,1).

## **5. THE THEOLOGY AND ECCLESIOLOGY THAT EMERGES FROM THE LASALLIAN TEACHING WITH REGARD TO MARY**

### **5.1. A teaching tested in the heat of prayer and reflection**

The presence of Mary in the writings of De La Salle illuminates areas of his thought, for example:

- \* the practical and vivid way in which our faith in God must flow - i.e. through Mary.

- \* His unreserved confidence in God and in the saints. He relied on God in every moment entrusting everything to him and to his Mother thus putting it in good hands.

- \* De La Salle was convinced of the lowliness of man as well as of his needs. In man’s natural state, damaged by sin, he is in need of redemption and cannot but entrust himself to the protection and mediation that God offers him through Mary. De La Salle approaches her confidently through means of his prayer.

- \* Sanctity is achieved through the ordinary events of life rather than through the extraordinary, through accomplishing the will of God in every moment — as did Mary in the obscurity of her home in Nazareth. The virtues which De La Salle highlights in Mary are the virtues which he presents to the Brother and to the Christian educator in general.

- \* He indicated a relationship with God and with Mary through prayer. He recommended docility to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit (AEP, 232), the journey in faith, dependence on the spirit of faith and the necessity of living the interior life.

- \* His teaching on Mary could have been taken from Vatican II (Cf. LG; 52-68) in that he

speaks about Mary as the model of sanctity and in her role as mediator as well as indicating appropriate devotion.

What one sees in these pages dedicated to Mary is the expression of the life which the Saint lived. In the fire of his reflection and prayer De La Salle contemplated the heart of Mary — her holy dispositions and her attitudes towards God. Consequently, his Marian writings, characterized by their originality and outstanding affection, carry persuasive power which is both stimulating and effective. Everything that he wrote about her stemmed from his utter conviction of the greatness of Mary. He presents a complete Marian theology speaking, as he does, of the main Marian dogmas and favours. In the person of Mary, the Brother and the Christian in general — including pupils who are educated in Lasallian Centres — find the best example for their lives as well as a reflection of what they must be if they are to please God.

## 5.2. Characteristics which De La Salle indicates for Marian devotion

These can be summarized in the following way:

**A - A devotion which communicates itself to others** — he frequently says “Cultivate this devotion; ask God for it and frequently remember and invoke so blessed a name” (MF 164,3).

**B - An admiring and effusive devotion** — he is left in awe at the greatness of Mary and the fidelity of God; “let us admire the abundance of graces which God bestowed on the Most Blessed Virgin from the moment of her birth” (MF 163,2). “Say with the whole Church that she is most beautiful... and that in her there was no stain of sin” (MF 82,1). Consequently, it is not surprising that he puts such emphasis in recommending that we have a singular devotion to Mary, “expressing deep affection for her” (MF 129,1) since “she is our good Mother” (MF 151,1) and that we inspire “tender devotion to her” (MF 146,2).

**C - An imitative devotion** — to meditate on the mysteries of Mary was, for the Founder, to deeply commit one’s life since it is a call to imitate the life of Mary in her deepest attitudes towards

God and towards people; “in the same way as Mary, the Brother must be grateful and give thanks to God from the depths of his heart, proclaiming a kind of second “magnificat” for what God has done through his ministry, allowing himself to be led by the Holy Spirit”. “It is God himself who has chosen you and called you to such a holy ministry”, writes De La Salle to the Brother and, hence, “be grateful to God for the favour he has accorded you in calling you to the ministry” (MR 199; 207; MF 163,3).

According to De La Salle, the Christian must link his personal prayer with the liturgical celebration of feasts in general, and Marian feasts in particular, with the intention of imitating Mary. Thus, for example, on the feast of the Birthday of Mary, he indicates that “the Christian should take the resolution and intention to be humble” while on the feast of the Presentation of Mary in the Temple “the faithful Christian must apply himself to God’s service”. On the feast of the Immaculate Conception he should commit himself “to live only for God” while on the feast of the Assumption he should beg Our Lady “for a death similar to hers” (DC III, 4<sup>o</sup>, Sec 3<sup>a</sup>).

## 5.3. With regard to the education of pupils

In speaking about the ministry of the Brother De La Salle presents its spiritual aspect for consideration. He requires that the “paternity” of the Brother — understood as the his close relationship with children and youth — be, above all, the means to make God known and loved; in accomplishing this the Brother performs a similar role to Mary. This spiritual “paternity” with which the Brother has been entrusted involves:

- \* procuring the life of God in the souls of children;
- \* educating them in the faith and in Christian practices;
- \* interceding with God and his Blessed Mother, through prayer and Gospel witness, for the conversion of those entrusted to his care;
- \* endeavouring, with ardent zeal, to enable youngsters to find their way in life and to be good Christian citizens, “linking piety with human for-

mation". (MF 160,3; 157,1; 122,3; 116,1; 146,2; 155,3; cf. Vat II, LG, 61).

#### 5.4. De La Salle teaching on Mary — Sure, Balanced and Profound

This tone, which was general in the writings of De La Salle, was accentuated in his Marian writings. The Saint was writing for religious and for educators in faith and thus he had to explain in a sure and balanced manner that would stimulate them to love with their hearts both what their minds learned and what their lips professed through the catechism and through their teaching.

De La Salle was on his guard against both highlighting the originality of his teaching or of falling into subtleties which lead nowhere. His theological formulas are reserved and based on Catholic dogma as proposed by the Church. As a Doctor of theology his exposition is well-reasoned. His Marian writings are solid models and his doctrine is the traditional since expressing himself in an original and striking manner was not his way.

As if constructing a spiritual structure which had to be both firm and secure, De La Salle supported his vision through:

**A - Sacred Scripture.** He presented Mary associated with the mysteries of the life of Jesus, both public and private. Starting from Revelation he sees Mary within the salvific plan of God in the same way that the Church to-day views her (LG 52-58).

**B - The tradition and history of the Church.** The Founder presented Mary as the Christian symbol who, after Jesus, is deeply rooted in the consciousness of believers and is deeply loved by them. He indicates this, among other ways through the practices in her honour, prayers to be recited most frequently, feasts, processions, visits to Marian shrines... (DC 111, pp. 15, 19, 21, 22, 195-212). It was also indicated by his recitation of the Rosary which led Blain to say that he was "an authentic apostle" for the spread of this devotion (Blain 2,490). Vatican II also treats this, too, in LG 60-68.

**C - The Liturgy.** His reflections were based on, and developed through, the liturgy of the Church since his Marian meditations follow the liturgical cycle.

**D - Theologians.** De La Salle was conversant with, and made use of, those theologians who in his judgement presented Mary in the best light. He also made use of those saints, in particular St. Bernard, who propagated her devotion. He also quoted from the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, for example, St. Augustin and St. Ambrose.

#### 6. CONCLUSION — DE LA SALLE AS A QUALIFIED MARIAN REPRESENTATIVE

"Given this teaching which was so wise and clear, so exactly adapted to the spiritual needs and preoccupations of Christians of his time and, furthermore, so appropriately presented in view of later developments, does not De La Salle deserve a special place among spiritual guides and representatives of orthodox Catholicism in the religious restoration accomplished during the reign of the first Bourbons?"<sup>15</sup> The Marian devotion inherited from De La Salle<sup>16</sup> continues among the Brothers to-day with vitality and love. His words and example are a light on the journey for Brothers, and for all associated with them, and Mary continues to be "the Star" who guides and "the Queen and Mother of the Christian Schools".

<sup>1</sup> Y. POUTET: *Un illustre Pèlerin de Chartres, Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle*, in *Notre-Dame de Chartres*, 1972, pp. 16-20.

<sup>2</sup> Oral tradition indicates the Lady Chapel — Ntra. Sra de la Buena Leche. Since 1951, there has been a statue of the Saint, by Lejeune, in the Chapel. GALLEGO S., *San Juan Bta. de La Salle*, Vol I, BAC 477, p. 125, note 73.

<sup>3</sup> GALLEGO S., *San Juan Bta. de La Salle*, Vol I, BAC 477, p. 186, note 140. In the second chapel on the left-hand side of the nave there is a stained-glass window and plaque commemorating the visit of the Founder.

<sup>4</sup> GALLEGO S., *San Juan Bta. de La Salle*, Vol I, BAC 477, pp. 229-230, note 14. De La Salle also visited the shrine in 1671 when he was in St. Sulpice. Cf. GALLEGO S., *op. cit.* p. 81, note 107.

<sup>5</sup> On this day, in the Society of St. Sulpice, clerical promises were renewed. Cf. GALLEGO S., *op. cit.*, Vol I, p. 245, note 86.

<sup>6</sup> PAUL F., *Las Cartas de San Juan Bta. de La Salle*, Colección Síntesis - 4 - Carta 37,2 p. 391. Without doubt it refers to the underground shrine of Our Lady of Chartres, so pleasing to the piety of the Founder.

<sup>7</sup> RIGAULT G., *Histoire générale de l'Institut des Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes*, Vol I, p. 264.

<sup>8</sup> GALLEGO S., *San Juan Bta. de La Salle*, Vol I, BAC 477, pp. 466-467. Cf. also p. 481, note 48.

<sup>9</sup> RIGAULT G., extract from Vol III of *Mariae-Etudes sur la Saint Vierge*, published under the direction of Hubert du Manoir, S.J., professor at the Catholic Institute of Paris, Beauchesne, Editeur, 117, rue de Rennes, Paris, 1954, p. 217.

<sup>10</sup> GALLEGO S., *San Juan Bta. de La Salle*, Vol II, BAC 478, p. 808.

<sup>11</sup> RIGAULT G., *Histoire Générale de L'Institut des Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes*, Vol II, p. 523.

<sup>12</sup> This teaching on the "mediation of Mary" enjoyed an unchallenged place in De La Salle's time — for example, in the work of Bérulle, Grignon de Montfort, John Eudes and J.J. Olier. Cf. HERMENT J., *La dévotion à la très Saint Vierge selon*

*St. Jean-Baptiste de La Salle*, La Procure, Rue des Tanneurs 161, Bruxelles, 1940. There are frequent references by De La Salle to this aspect of Mary's role — cf. EM C.L. 50, notes 215 and 239.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. EM C.L., note 216. De La Salle discreetly deals here with an act of submission to Mary which might evoke distant echoes of Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort's "holy slavery".

<sup>14</sup> In addition to what De La Salle writes in the meditations we also find the Marian theme elsewhere — for example, in DC II, pp. 300-302, in the explanation of the Rosary and how it should be prayed; in *the Conduct of Schools*, II, VIII, 5 and I, VII,I, to pray the Rosary in turn in the School; in RB p. 11 Ch. VI, art. 1, Mary as a model of politeness; and in DC III, p. 105, hymns.

<sup>15</sup> RIGAULT G., *op. cit.*, Vol III, *Etudes sur la Saint Vierge*, p. 216.

<sup>16</sup> BLAIN, Vol II, pp. 15, 49, 89. — *Short life of the Brothers*. He does not speak of Brother Ireneus although he was alive when Blain was writing the biography of De La Salle. Cf. GALLEGO S., *op. cit.*, Vol I, p. 558 and notes 23 and 31.

### Complementary Themes:

Pupil; Love, Application; Affection; Zeal; Christian; Community, Conversion; Heart; To give thanks; The duties of a Christian; Detachment; Devotion; Director; Scripture; School; Edification; Education; The Holy Spirit; Gospel; Faith; Fidelity; Humility; Inspirations; Teaching; Institute; Justice; Ministry; Mass; Novitiate; Obedience, Pray - Prayers; Mental Prayer; The Presence of God; Piety; Poverty; The poor; To procure the glory of God; Recreation; Rule; Salvation; Saints; Silence: Society: Solitude; Trinity; The will of God; Vows.

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9. Cf. VATICAN II, *Dogmatic Constitution - Lumen Gentium*, ch. 8 (52 to 68).

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